

'Why should I kill my own people'

Soldiers, police flee to India with tales of violence

AFP, Aizawl

Shaking and clutching his T-shirt, Myanmar soldier Kyaw recalled the violence he said he was told to use on people in his own community -- orders that triggered his escape to India.

Kyaw, whose name has been changed to protect his identity, was among 40 Myanmar nationals -- mostly police officers -- whom AFP met as they hid in an undisclosed location in India's northeastern state of Mizoram.

At least 180 people have been killed in Myanmar since the February 1 coup.

The violence has seen more than 300 Myanmar nationals -- many of them police officers and their families, as well as two military personnel -- enter Mizoram, a local helping with the border crossings told AFP on Monday.

Kyaw, a 24-year-old rifleman who said he had served in the military for around four years, is a member of the Chin, a mainly Christian minority in Myanmar.

He told AFP he had been ordered to inflict lethal violence among the Chin and inform on them.

"The military was giving orders to kill innocent people, who are like my own mother and father," he told AFP.

"Why should I kill my own people."

He said it took him four days to get to Mizoram on a motorcycle and on foot.



After calling home when he reached India, the father-of-two said he found out that his family house had been searched and his father arrested.

Another rifleman AFP spoke to said he also feared for his family's safety. "My friends shot at protesters and I was told to shoot as well... But I cannot kill my people. So, I ran away at night," the 21-year-old said.

Those AFP met said they had fled without their families because the journey was so difficult.

Twenty-four-year-old policewoman Chewa, whose name has also been changed, broke down in tears as she shared her story.

She said the soldiers were being given orders to shoot protesters, with police assigned to give extra security.

Chewa said she joined the civil disobedience movement, involving tens of thousands of government workers across Myanmar.

"I want democracy back," she said, her voice choking with emotion.



People react, as they attend the funeral of Khant Nyar Hein, 17 years old medical student who was shot and killed during the security force crackdown on anti-coup protesters in Yangon, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Hundreds have disappeared

Says UN; funerals held for slain activists as anti-coup protests continue in Myanmar

AGENCIES

The UN yesterday decried surging deaths in Myanmar since the February 1 coup, warning that detained protesters were facing torture and hundreds had disappeared.

"The death toll has soared over the past week in Myanmar, where security forces have been using lethal force increasingly aggressively against peaceful protesters," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters.

In total, she said, the office had corroborated that a total of 149 people had died in the crackdown on protests since February 1, but stressed that the actual number was surely much higher. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAP), more than 180 people have been killed, including 74 on Sunday alone.

In addition to the killings, Shamdasani warned that security forces were continuing to arbitrarily arrest and detain people throughout the country, with at least 2,084 people currently being held, reports AFP.

"Deeply distressing reports of torture in



custody have also emerged," she said.

The office had determined that "at least five deaths in custody have occurred in recent weeks," she said, adding that "at least two victims' bodies have shown signs of severe physical abuse indicating that they were tortured."

In addition, "hundreds of people who have been unlawfully detained remain unaccounted for and have not been acknowledged by the military authorities."

This, Shamdasani said, "amounts to enforced disappearances."

Her comment came after security forces escalated the use of lethal force against anti-coup protesters, despite appeals for restraint.

Meanwhile, families of dozens of people killed in demonstrations against military rule attended their funerals yesterday as more protesters defied the security forces and at least one man was shot dead.

A crematorium in Yangon reported 31 funerals, a mourner at one of the ceremonies said.

Some families told media the security forces had seized the bodies of victims, but they would still hold a funeral.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was appalled by the escalating violence and called on the international community to help end the repression, his spokesman said, while the United States also denounced the bloodshed.

"The military is attempting to overturn the results of a democratic election and is brutally repressing peaceful protesters," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a news conference in Tokyo yesterday.

Attack on Afghan univ bus kills 2

REUTERS, Kabul

Gunmen ambushed a bus carrying university staff in northeastern Afghanistan yesterday killing the driver and a student, officials said, as attacks on civilians continued, while peace talks between the government and the Taliban remained stalled.

Six university lecturers were also wounded during the attack in Baghlan province, said a spokesman for the interior ministry.

The ministry blamed the Taliban for the attack, but the group denied.

On the other side of the country, unidentified gunmen attacked security forces guarding a dam in Herat, killing three, wounding one, according to officials. Four other members of the security forces were missing.



Zoe, 18-month-old asylum seeking migrant girl from Honduras, cries while being held by her mother Evelyn as she and other migrants await to be transported by the US Border Patrol after crossing the Rio Grande river into the United States from Mexico on a raft in Penitas, Texas, US on Monday.

Israel unearths 2000-year-old biblical scroll

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday said it had discovered pieces of a biblical scroll dating back some 2,000 years, describing the find as one of the most significant since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

"For the first time in approximately 60 years, archaeological excavations have uncovered fragments of a biblical scroll," the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said.

Following a years-long dig in caves and cliffs in the Judean desert, the authority said it had also discovered a cache of rare coins, a six-millennia-old skeleton of a child and basket it described as the oldest in the world, at over 10,000 years.

The finds are a result of survey of some 80 kilometres of cliffs in a desert area spanning southern Israel and the occupied West Bank. Using drones, mountain climbing gear and rappelling equipment, Israeli archaeologists searched caves they said were used by Jews rebelling against the Romans during the failed second-century Bar Kochba revolt.

The fragments of the scroll include passages written in Greek from the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets, part of the Hebrew Bible, the IAA said.

Red Sea scrolls include some 900 manuscripts found between 1947 and 1956 in the Qumran caves above the Dead Sea in the West Bank. They are some of the earliest biblical texts ever discovered.

Myanmar's 'people should not suffer'

India indicates it seeks peaceful solution of crisis without sanctions

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India has indicated that it disfavours economic sanctions against Myanmar in the wake of the military coup there, saying "people on the ground should not suffer."

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla also said it is "working in the UN Security Council in a constructive manner to facilitate balanced outcomes that could assist in resolving the situation" in Myanmar.

"The recent developments in Myanmar are a matter of deep concern. We remain concerned that the gains made by Myanmar over the last decades on the path towards democracy should not be undermined," he said while delivering a lecture on 'What Next for Neighbourhood First' at a private think-tank in New Delhi on Monday.

Shringla said India has "always been steadfast" in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar for it to emerge as a stable democratic federal union.

"Our developmental and humanitarian efforts in Myanmar have been aimed at the socio-economic development of the country. We need to continue with these efforts in the interest of the people of Myanmar. We feel that people on the ground should not suffer," he said in an apparent reference to calls by some countries for imposition of sanctions against Myanmar.

The Foreign Secretary said India would continue to closely monitor the situation in Myanmar and remain engaged with like-minded countries to meet the hopes and aspirations of the people of the country.

Elaborating on the neighbourhood first policy, he said "India will be a force for good in the neighbourhood" because "the stability, growth and prosperity of those nearest to us will help India and is in India's interest."

"The neighbourhood has, therefore, received the greatest attention and emphasis in our diplomatic efforts and will continue to do so. It also receives the greatest priority in allocation of funds and resources and will also continue to do so," the Indian Foreign Secretary said.



Burqa ban for nat'l security: Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan government insisted yesterday that preventing Muslim women from wearing a burqa or niqab was a national security move, as it faced protests over the decision.

Sri Lankan Muslims decried the measure as a new act of discrimination against their community, which accounts for 10 percent of the 21 million, B u d d h i s t - m a j o r i t y population.

Colombo's nationalist government has taken a tough security line since a suicide bomb attacks in April 2019 that killed 279 people.

The ban on the burqa, a traditional Islamic head-to-toe garment, and the niqab veil, was announced last Saturday with Public Security Minister Sarath Weerasekera saying they were symbols of Islamic extremism.

The minister said Sri Lanka would also shut down private madrasas, Islamic religious schools.

After a cabinet meeting Monday, government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said: "We will move forward on the basis of national security, nothing else."

He said there would be more cabinet talks before the ban is legalised and implemented.

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